

How to Make Your baby Sleep



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The last thing you want is a child who's not ready to unwind when you are.

While you can't force a child to fall asleep at your command, there are things that soften the bed, so to speak.

Why rocking + lullabies really can work

"Making children feel sleepy requires decreasing their level of cortisol, the hormone that keeps them revved up and ready to go," says pediatrician Maureen Ahmann, DO. "To decrease cortisol, calm their senses."

Rocking your baby and singing a lullaby may be the best-known calming techniques, but any type of sensory soothing can work, says Dr. Ahmann. Try:

- Swaddling (for infants).
- Massage.
- Any light, repetitive movement, like swaying or swinging.
- Feeding (not until babies fall asleep, but just until they become drowsy).
- Dimming the lights.
- Playing soft music or tranquil sounds from a white noise machine or app. (Turn off the TV.)

"The key is removing stimulation and signaling the body that it's time to rest," says Dr. Ahmann.

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What about a ride in the car?

Some parents claim that a ride in the car is a sure-fire way to induce sleep. In desperate times it may be tempting to buckle baby in the car seat and drive around the block. Just don't do it for long, says Dr. Ahmann.

Sleeping in the car, while sometimes unavoidable, is not a good habit. Your baby is safest sleeping on a firm, flat surface, not propped up in a seat.

Every year hundreds of U.S. infants die due to unsafe sleep environments. Make sure your baby sleeps safely all the time. It's non-negotiable, says Dr. Ahmann.

For babies, safe sleep means lying flat on the back with no blankets heavier than a hospital receiving blanket. There should be no stuffed animals in the crib. Do not use crib bumpers, pillows or any type of cushions for propping up your baby — not even items marketed to help babies sleep better.

The best way to trigger tiredness

Tactics to make your baby drowsy only do so much. The best way to get children to sleep when they're supposed to is to establish a wake-sleep schedule and stick to it, says Dr. Ahmann.

"Nothing works better than keeping kids on a schedule," she says. "It's not always possible with so many demands on today's parents — and life can throw curveballs — but keep nap and night sleep times consistent the best you can."

Babies respond to consistency and structure, says Dr. Ahmann. The less you disrupt their schedule, the more likely they'll fall asleep on time.

"If your baby regularly has a tough time falling asleep at night, you may need to adjust their nap schedule," she says. "Gradually move morning and afternoon naps earlier."

3 things not to do

There are numerous ways to get your baby to settle down for slumber. But here are three things you shouldn't try:

1. Keeping baby awake all day to sleep longer at night. This typically does not work, says Dr. Ahmann. Being overtired can make your baby — and everyone within earshot — miserable. And baby's stress from being overtired can make it harder to relax and rest later.
2. Putting cereal in the bedtime bottle. People used to think that cereal could keep a baby's belly fuller, preventing them from waking up for a nighttime feeding. That's not true, says Dr. Ahmann. "We've learned that eating cereal before bed doesn't make babies sleep longer and actually can cause more restlessness due to gas pain," she says. Babies should only have breast milk or formula in their bottle. Feed your baby cereal only when he or she can eat it off a spoon, usually beginning at 6 to 9 months.
3. Holding your baby as you fall asleep. Remember that safe sleep is a must. "Too frequently, exhausted parents fall asleep holding their baby and wake up hours later to find the baby in a dangerous position," says Dr. Ahmann. "If you're tired, put your baby back in the crib. A baby will not die from crying in their crib."

Following a consistent schedule and using calming techniques should be all you need to ensure a sufficient sleepyhead. Getting baby to sleep on time is one step toward getting yourself to sleep on time too.

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